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## The Thailand-U.S. Defense Alliance in U.S.-Indo-Pacific Strategy

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# AsiaPacific

I S S U E S

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*Papers in the AsiaPacific Issues series feature topics of broad interest and significant impact relevant to current and emerging policy debates. The views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Center.*

**SUMMARY** After 200 years of diplomatic relations, the time has come for the United States and Thailand to build upon this strong foundation and chart a new course for their alliance in the Indo-Pacific region. This re-examination has hit roadblocks in recent years, as Thailand grapples with the effects of its ongoing coup and the role of the United States in the region is questioned at home and abroad. However, an opportunity has presented itself in the form of the United States's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP). Both the United States and Thailand could capitalize on FOIP's call for an updated, comprehensive strategy towards the region. Though still in the early stages, Thailand's central role in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) combined with its long history with the United States position it to have a strong influence on what shape FOIP will take and highlight its importance as an ally to the United States.

Thailand-U.S. relations reached a significant milestone in 2018 when the two countries marked the 200-year anniversary of diplomatic ties. Since Thailand became the first Asian nation to establish ties with the United States in 1818, the two countries' bilateral relations have been tested through two centuries of global turbulence and change. To mark the occasion and to demonstrate their longstanding friendship, the two countries organized a series of activities and programs.

Along with these commemorations—under the theme of “Great and Good Friends,” the phrase first used by U.S. President Abraham Lincoln in a letter to King Mongkut in 1862—abundant questions have been asked about the best way to promote the friendship and partnership so they remain relevant with mutual benefit. To add value to the relationship in the 21st century, Thailand and the United States do not have to reinvent the wheel, but they do need to look toward the future to reenergize and reengage with each other by relying on existing mechanisms that have proven successful. Although the emerging strategic environment in regional and international affairs remains unpredictable, the two countries' bilateral ties remain ironclad.

To move ahead in the age of the Indo-Pacific, the Thailand-U.S. defense alliance must reinvent itself with a new strategic outlook in order to maximize bilateral treaty commitments. In addition, as a key player in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its chair in 2019, Thailand can play an important role in the new global strategy as a balance for the great powers, enabling them to compete in peaceful ways while maintaining ASEAN centrality. With its century-old independent and balanced diplomacy and network of regional and international partners, Thailand can also serve as a deterrent to any nation seeking to exercise hegemony in the region.

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### **Thailand-U.S. Defense Alliance during the Cold War**

After the establishment of Thailand-U.S. diplomatic relations in 1818, it would take another 15 years for the two countries to formalize their friendship and begin bilateral trade with the signing of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1833. Their relations progressed steadily through regular trade and diplomatic contacts. A more substantive relationship began in the 20th century when Thailand entered World War II aligned with the Axis powers. After their defeat, the United States played a principle role in saving Thailand from the being treated as an enemy country by recognizing the Free Thai Movement's declaration of support for the Allied Forces. After admission to the United Nations in 1946, Thailand continued to align itself with the United States in the nascent world body as well as adopting a pro-U.S. foreign policy to protect the country's fragile international profile resulting from its collaboration with the Axis powers. After World War II, the United States unwaveringly backed Thailand in international arenas. With the emergence of the Cold War and the ideological competition between the United States and the former Soviet Union, the United States feared that Thailand and other countries in Southeast Asia could fall into the communist domain if left alone without security protection. As part of the regional strategy to contain the spread of communism, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), or Manila Pact, was formed. Despite the dissolution of SEATO in 1977, the Manila Pact remains in force. As an offshoot of the pact, the Thanat-Rusk communiqué was signed in 1962 to strengthen U.S. defense ties with Thailand and specifically to protect from the communist threat.<sup>1</sup>

With extensive airbases throughout the country, Thailand was used as a launching platform to attack communist positions in these three countries. After the Vietnam War and the end of the civil war in

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Cambodia, Thailand–United States defense relations continued unabated even though they lacked the same urgency and strategic values that Thailand had previously enjoyed. The bilateral military exercise Cobra Gold, which began in 1981, along with training programs and moderate arms procurement have been pivotal linkages that have helped to preserve the two countries’ post-war relationship.

The terrorist attacks in New York and on the Pentagon in September 2001 were another turning point in Thailand–United States relations as Washington refocused its strategic outlook toward Southeast Asia as the second front in its global war against terrorism. Washington also sought additional assistance from allies and friends, including searching for new partners in the global war. Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was one of the ASEAN leaders who successfully forged strong personal ties with President George W. Bush, which quickly led to close and deeper cooperation with U.S. intelligence and security communities. The temporary black site for detention of suspected terrorists in Udon Thani province in 2002 and the arrest of Riduan Isamuddin, or Hambali, in August 2003 were two highlights of the two countries’ rejuvenated friendship. Hambali was the head of the Jemaah Islamiyah terror group. He also was a mastermind behind the Bali bombing in October 2002. Thailand was later awarded major non-Nato ally status and fast-track free trade agreement negotiations with the United States in 2003. However, the latter was aborted after two years of painful talks due to the rise of anti-U.S. sentiment over the issue of pharmaceutical patent protection.

**Rebooting and Reinventing the Thailand–United States Defense Alliance**

It was not until 2012 that Thailand–U.S. ties received a major reboot after a decade of stalled relations caused by political turmoil and infighting in Thailand. President Barack Obama made a brief

stopover in Bangkok in November 2012 as part of his ASEAN tour. Interviews with U.S. officials working on the two countries’ relations revealed that the visit was pivotal to putting Thailand on the radar again among U.S. policymakers. The two countries were able to review and strengthen security cooperation in the post–Cold War environment for the first time since the Thanat-Rusk communiqué. Both sides realized they need to reinvent their security cooperation with new cooperation. The Joint Vision Statement on Thai–U.S. Defense Alliance, issued after Obama’s visit addressed 21st-century security challenges that the two countries would prioritize in four areas: (1) partnership for regional security in Southeast Asia; (2) support stability in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond; (3) bilateral and multilateral interoperability and readiness; and (4) relationship building, coordination, and collaboration at all levels.<sup>2</sup>

The new vision perceives Thailand as playing a central role in the U.S. security strategy in Southeast Asia as well as serving as the driving force within ASEAN amid the rise of China. Given Thailand’s close ties with China, Japan, and India, the United States expects Thailand to play a balancing role among the great powers with the ultimate objective of preventing any power from dominating the region. As both countries were looking forward earnestly to closer security cooperation, Thailand’s domestic developments took a new twist on May 22, 2014, when the government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra was toppled by a military coup. The unexpected power seizure immediately pushed back overall progress in relations between the two countries. The U.S. Department of State strongly condemned the coup and severed all assistance programs with the exception of the Cobra Gold and humanitarian and law enforcement programs. Unlike the previous coup, Washington’s reaction this time was substantially harsher, partly because of the Obama

administration's added emphasis on promotion of democratic values and human rights. In addition, the U.S. embassy in Bangkok, which had received repeated assurances from the Thai military leaders that they would not stage a coup, was highly disappointed and hardened overall responses.

Despite active mutual diplomatic efforts to maintain the existing comfort level during the junta's ruling, bilateral ties—especially personal ties at the top levels—failed to take off, hitting an all-time low in the 200-year history of Thailand-U.S. relations. Instead of being considered just another coup as in the long history of coups that marked brief ups and downs in its friendship with the United States, the latest coup turned out to be an aberration with far-reaching repercussions due to its longevity and unintended consequences. The previous coup, in September 2006, had lasted just 466 days before a general election was scheduled. Now, the next general election has been scheduled on March 24, 2019, as announced by the Election Commission. This extended period under military rule has rendered quite a devastating impact on Thailand-U.S. relations, as Washington and the United States Congress were not able to soften the U.S. legal stand against the junta. Other great powers such as China, Japan, Russia, and India have taken advantage of the situation to forge closer political and security ties with Thailand.

After President Donald Trump was sworn in on January 20, 2017, bilateral ties took a swift turn. Within three months, the White House signaled that strengthening ties with allies and friends would be one of its foreign policy priorities. It was a dramatic departure from the Obama years, which prohibited all contacts at senior and middle levels with Thailand. As the junta entered the third year, the repeated pledges it has made to hold a general election in early 2019 have finally won support from Western democracies, which decided to gradually tear down the no-contact bans in place. During

the first six months of 2017, senior U.S. officials from the White House and State Department took turns visiting Thailand to reaffirm the importance of Thailand-U.S. relations and discuss the process of normalization. At the end of March 2017, the White House indicated that Trump would invite the Thai prime minister to Washington. While other ASEAN leaders, including Vietnam and Malaysia, were the first to visit the White House under the new administration in June and September of 2017 respectively, Prime Minister Prayut's trip to Washington in October 2017 provided a new impetus for Thailand-U.S. relations. Trump and Prayut were able to rejuvenate the significance of the 200-year-old friendship and oldest alliance in the region. The rather comprehensive joint statement issued after his visit was designed to restore confidence of the Thailand-U.S. defense alliance, stating that the two leaders shared a vision of a stronger alliance for common security, a closer economic partnership for common prosperity, and growing people-to-people ties. After Prayut's visit, Thailand-U.S. cooperation intensified at full throttle.

Improved ties with Thailand also came at the time when the Trump administration upped its ante in the Korean Peninsula, attempting to get North Korea to denuclearize. As one of the ASEAN members that has maintained a stable but closed relationship with Pyongyang, Thailand together with other ASEAN members, including Singapore and Malaysia, has played a significant role in helping the United States to increase regional pressure on North Korea over denuclearization. Due to its central location, Washington was targeting Bangkok, considered the nerve of Pyongyang's underground trade and financial network in Southeast Asia. Thailand formerly had amicable relations with North Korea, with two-way trade amounting to US\$150 million per year in the past five years. However, all export-import transactions between the two countries ended in January 2018

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following U.S. request. Currently, taking advantages of improved ties, Thailand and the United States are working on new frameworks of enhanced security cooperation that include maritime domain awareness; strengthening maritime security cooperation and various capacity-building programs related to logistics; military-industrial research; and movement coordination of aircraft, personnel, and cargo. Thailand views these new areas of cooperation as a countervailing force against the pro-China stand frequently heard from the Thai military.

#### **'Thailand in Washington': Tales of Disappointment and Lack of Communication**

The argument has been made that Washington is not only the U.S. capital but is considered the capital of the world. What is said and discussed has implications in bilateral relations as well as in the global political system.<sup>3</sup> Interviews and discussions with three dozen current and former government officials, experts, lobbyists, scholars, and businessmen as well as aides to U.S. lawmakers on the state of Thailand-U.S. relations reveal how U.S. policymakers have viewed Thailand.<sup>4</sup> Although not new, all of these views have something unique to say about Thailand's overall situation and bilateral ties in particular, reflecting a divergent assessment. Some opinions are factual while others are simply based on stereotypes and misperceptions. The most often-heard remark was that Thailand has itself to blame due to domestic uncertainties as they are impediments to better bilateral relations in huge and sustained ways. Obviously, Thailand as viewed in Washington—the perception of U.S. lawmakers—is different from Thailand as viewed in Thailand.

Several salient points stand out from the interviews. Those interviewed said that Thailand needs to make its presence strongly felt in Washington. During the eight-year period from 2004 to 2012, all seven Thai ambassadors failed to serve a full

term. Short-term ambassadorial appointments in one of the country's most important diplomatic missions reflected Bangkok's complete lack of urgency to strengthen its presence and relations in Washington. Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia have the most versatile ambassadors in place with large staffs to cover contacts with the movers and shakers in Washington in a sustainable manner. Without adequate representation in the capital that allowed indigenous voices to be heard, views about Thailand were often channeled through the eyes and views of nondiplomatic sources, especially from international and civil-society organizations.

U.S. officials working for the Trump administration strongly believed that Thailand must improve communications with U.S. policymakers in the capital in a sustainable manner. In short, the Thai diplomatic corps must articulate Thai views and be able to explain them to their American counterparts. More importantly, they have to "walk the Hill" to ensure that U.S. lawmakers understand the local situation as the local understands it. This is an important measure that would place Thailand on their agenda. Furthermore, Thailand must "make itself relevant" to the U.S. global strategy, especially with respect to its policy in Southeast Asia. As a U.S. treaty ally, Thailand remains a valuable asset, but U.S. policymakers and Congress need to be constantly reminded of the country's importance to the United States and how it could fit in the broader U.S. strategy and interest.

U.S. security experts emphasized that Thailand must also fulfil its security alliance commitments. This has been a key issue for the past seven decades. Truth be told, the earlier years of Thailand-U.S. defense cooperation were completely based on the fight against the spread of communism as stated clearly in the 1962 Thanat-Rusk joint communiqué. However, in the post-Cold War era Thailand's security commitment as an ally has gradually



eroded. Meanwhile, China continues to rise and to expand its influence in the region. Instead of strengthening defense ties with the United States, Thai policymakers continue to befriend China. Ruptures in Thailand-U.S. ties due to political turmoil and uncertainty in Thailand also provided good opportunities for China to make substantial progress in its relations with the country. Due to stable Thailand-U.S. military ties, the Thanat-Rush communiqué has remained untouched for 56 years. Since there was no provision for review or monitoring, as in other U.S. treaty alliances such as with the Philippines or Australia, neither the United States nor Thailand has bothered to amend it. At this point in time as the international environment becomes more fluid and unpredictable, it is critical that Thailand manifest some definitive pathway to strengthen security cooperation with the United States under the Trump administration, both bilaterally and internationally.

Some U.S. officials who used to work closely with Thailand have lamented that current Thai officials do not trust their U.S. counterparts even though the United States saved Thailand from communism and other threats. They cited the toxic outcome of numerous coups, which have retarded progress on bilateral ties. Despite excellent defense ties and good personal rapport among senior Thai and U.S. officials, for instance, the level of mutual trust has receded dramatically among Thai officials, especially in the aftermath of the May 2014 coup. Some of Thai soldiers have expressed concern over the perceived U.S. interference in Thai politics as a threat to their country's security.<sup>5</sup>

After the student uprising and democratic transition from 1973 to 2000, bilateral ties were quite stable as Thailand was trying to consolidate its fragile democratic institutes. But this effort was derailed when the country was hit by the economic downturn leading to the Asian economic crisis in 1997, with serious economic repercussions in

South Korea, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Before the 2006 coup, the country's 17th, Thailand enjoyed a 15-year span of democratic rule. This period was a moment of glory as the country was considered a beacon of democracy in Southeast Asia with a free press and was praised for its approach to human rights. After all, given that Thailand transitioned from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy in 1932, with such a long experience one would hope that the country should have made tangible progress in establishing democratic institutions. However, such was not the case, mainly due to internal divisions and polarization that existed 86 years ago and continue even now in Thai society.

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#### **New Strategic Convergences: Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP)**

From June 23 to Jul 10, 2018, the Indo-Pacific Command dispatched 42 officials to assist Thailand's rescue efforts for the young football team trapped deep inside a cave complex in Chiang Rai. The rescue mission, which was also joined by rescuers from other countries, represented an ideal crisis response that brought out the best of bilateral and multilateral relations between Thailand and the United States. It allowed Thai and U.S. rescue teams to plan and work together, thanks to decades-long joint training that helped to increase interoperability, both military and civilian. The cave rescue was a positive news story that has been missing from the archives of Thailand-U.S. relations for the past four decades since the end of Cold War.

The latest U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS), released in 2017, briefly mentions the two Southeast Asian allies, Thailand and the Philippines, but singles out four other ASEAN countries—Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore—as its growing security and economic partners.<sup>6</sup> This was a wake-up call for Thailand, which often mistakenly perceived itself as the pivotal state in U.S. grand strategy due to its

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status as a treaty ally situated in the heartland of Southeast Asia. Since the end of the Cold War, the two countries' military ties have not been as close as before. The absence of strategic convergence further eroded Thailand's strategic value to the United States. Following Trump's announcement of the FOIP strategy in Danang, Vietnam, in November 2017, few details emerged from Washington. In April, Alex Wong, deputy assistant secretary for the bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, was the first senior U.S. official to put meat on the bones of the strategy. Wong pointed out that the FOIP has both domestic and international dimensions. Domestically, the United States would like to see "the societies of the various Indo-Pacific countries to become progressively more free—free in terms of good governance, in terms of fundamental rights, in terms of transparency and anti-corruption." He noted that this implies open logistics, more investment, and more transparent regulatory structures related to infrastructure and clarified that in the international realm "open and free" means open sea lanes of communication and open airways as well as free, fair, and reciprocal trade.<sup>7</sup>

Two months later, Defense Secretary James Mattis gave more details of the strategic elements of the FOIP.<sup>8</sup> Mattis outlined the strategy's four key elements in front of senior defense officials from ASEAN. First, it focuses on the maritime space, the so-called maritime commons. The United States would like to build up naval and law enforcement capabilities and capacities to improve monitoring and projection of maritime borders and interests. Second, it aims at increasing interoperability. Washington believes that a network of allies and partners working together, and the resulting closer ties between militaries and economies, will contribute to enduring trust. Third, the strategy calls for strengthening the rule of law, civil society, and transparent government

as well as promoting sustainable economic development. Fourth, the private sector will take the lead in development of infrastructure. This means pushing development and finance institutions to be "better, more responsive partners" with knowledge and technical transfers with end-to-end solutions, without surrendering economic sovereignty. In a nutshell, Mattis reaffirmed the essence of the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy as a subset of the broader U.S. security strategy. "Make no mistake: America is in the Indo-Pacific to stay. This is our priority theatre," Mattis declared. To underscore the importance of the new strategy, the current United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) in Hawaii had changed its name to the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM).

At the ASEAN foreign ministerial meeting in Singapore in August 2018, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the allocation of US\$300 million to strengthen security in the Indo-Pacific region, which followed hot on the heels of a US\$113 million economic initiative announced at the end of July 2018 in Washington. Putting all the details together, this financial commitment showed Trump's determination to push forward the Indo-Pacific strategy.

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### **Thailand's Role in FOIP and the ASEAN Chairmanship in 2019**

The United States introduced the FOIP strategy at the right time. Thailand has already conveyed its strong support, as it could usher the country into the center of the regional scheme of things.<sup>9</sup> In coming months and years, Thailand would be able to take up the FOIP not only independently but also as part of ASEAN. Five reasons for this can be discerned.

First, Thailand has assumed ASEAN chairmanship in 2019, succeeding Singapore. As of August 2018, ASEAN had not yet substantially discussed the FOIP, as its leaders still did not have

sufficient information about the concept and its operationalization plan. In November 2018 at the 33rd ASEAN summit, the group's leaders discussed the U.S. strategy but did not reach any consensus. The chairman's joint statement simply said that they look forward to discussing it further. As of September 2018, Jakarta had spearheaded a senior official meeting (SOM) among ASEAN to discuss the FOIP so that the bloc could form a common position. Vice President Mike Pence, standing in for Donald Trump, made a hard push for the Indo-Pacific strategy with ASEAN. At the summit, the ASEAN leaders agreed to conduct further study of the U.S. proposal. By the next East Asia Summit in November 2019, ASEAN hopes to have its own strategic plan for the Indo-Pacific, with a different name. As the incoming chair, Thailand, can work together with the United States to fine tune the FOIP. Thailand has already pledged to coordinate with ASEAN members to ensure that the ASEAN version would contain rules-based and norms that would strengthen the ASEAN centrality as well as peace and stability in the region.

Second, Thailand is also one of five U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific theatre, along with Japan, South Korea, Australia, and the Philippines. While Washington continues to emphasize the importance of strategic relations with all its defense allies in the region, Thailand has been pushed to the back benches. After the end of Cold War, the Thailand-U.S. defense alliance did not enjoy the same strategic significance as before. In the post-Cold War era, all of the former Indochinese countries have joined ASEAN and have good relations with Thailand.

The FOIP is considered a new area of strategic convergence in which Thailand and the United States can work together using existing networks that have been established for decades. If necessary, the two countries can also create new ones. Mattis affirmed that with the strategy in place, the countries in the region could work together

to promote their economies and security while protecting their sovereignty and independence. "No one nation can or should dominate the Indo-Pacific," Mattis reiterated in Singapore.<sup>10</sup>

Third, Thailand is in a good position to promote ASEAN centrality as a partnership of the FOIP strategy. Since Thailand helped found ASEAN in 1967, its principal foreign policy tenet toward the bloc has never changed. Bangkok has long served as the cradle of ASEAN because of its consistency on ASEAN matters. ASEAN has become part of the country's diplomatic DNA as well as its largest trading partner. In addition, last year Thailand attracted nearly 10 million tourists from the other nine ASEAN members, generating billions of dollars in revenue. Therefore, it is natural that Thailand would make every effort to continue to promote ASEAN centrality in every possible area. In Vientiane, Laos, in 2016, Thailand urged its ASEAN colleagues to raise the profile of the 40-year-old Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), the region's first regional code of conduct. Now, with 37 signatories, the group's members have agreed to jointly promote the TAC as an international code of conduct. This was part of a concerted effort to promote ASEAN centrality.

Fourth, Thailand can help to increase the interoperability between the United States and the rest of the ASEAN members. Since 1981, Thailand and the United States have jointly organized the region's largest annual military exercise, Cobra Gold. What started out as a bilateral military affair 37 years ago has now become a multinational military exercise with troops from 28 countries. The exercise allows U.S. friends and allies to learn from one another how to work and plan together under a single command and control in a regional humanitarian or disaster crisis. Under the FOIP strategy, this interoperability should be given priority. Future enhanced security cooperation between the two countries would have positive impacts,

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increasing interoperability within the grouping.

Fifth, Thailand has an independent foreign policy, which has been accepted by all neighboring countries and great powers. Its centuries-old balanced diplomacy saved the country from colonial powers—making it the only country in Southeast Asia to avoid European colonial rule. Traditionally, Thailand would continue to engage great powers in geopolitical and geoeconomic terms to make sure they can coexist peacefully. With its balanced and non-confrontational approach, Thailand remains a pillar in guaranteeing that ASEAN will not stray and side with any major power.

Finally, the country is gearing up to hold a long-awaited election in March 2019. As such, it will send a strong message to the international community that Thailand has finally returned to its old democratic self. Beginning in 2018, major Western countries, including the United States, the European Union, and Australia have gradually resumed bilateral engagements with Thailand. In July, the U.S. State Department finally recognized Thailand's four years of continued efforts to improve human rights and the working conditions of millions of migrant workers, which had previously been a bone of contention between the two countries. Washington upgraded Thailand to Tier 2 in the Trafficking in Persons Report 2018.<sup>11</sup> Suffice it to say that with a civilian government in place after the March 2019, Thailand's diplomatic role should resume greater significance, granted a new set of internal and external challenges.

## Conclusion

The FOIP strategy gives Thailand a unique opportunity to jump-start the stalled Thailand-U.S. defense alliance. For nearly three decades, these security ties have not been maximized because of a lack of confluence of interests. Thailand's oft-maligned domestic political environment often adds an element of uncertainty to one of the most important security links the United States has with Southeast Asia. The current strategic environment has created new challenges to compliance with international norms and rule of law. The FOIP strategy reflects Thailand's desire to strengthen peace, stability, and well-being in the region. Further, it aims at promoting better relations and cooperation among allies and friends in economic, security, and social areas. Thailand, as a key defense ally of the United States and active member of ASEAN, can fulfill these dual roles to bridge the Indian and Pacific oceans into one interlinked strategic area and ensure that the contest among great powers for influence in the region would not degenerate into hegemony.

With Thailand's return to full-fledged democracy and governance after a nearly five-year lapse, its traditional role of providing a balance to the great powers will be revived and become more dynamic. Therefore, Washington needs to resume its regional leadership.

As it assumes the ASEAN chairmanship, Thailand can help to shape the organization's agenda and substance to reflect the will of the ASEAN Community as a whole as well as its comprehensive relationship with all dialogue partners, including supporting the FOIP.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Buscinski, Lszak. 1980. "Thailand and the Manila Pact," *The World Today*, 36(2): 45–51.

<sup>2</sup> Joint Thai-US Vision Statement 2012, <http://archive.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=15685>

<sup>3</sup> Calder, Kent E. 2014. *Asia in Washington*. 64. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

<sup>4</sup> Interviews were conducted between April 15 and July 15, 2018, during the Asian Studies Fellowship at the East-West Center, Washington, DC

<sup>5</sup> Blaxland, John and Greg Raymond. 2017. "Tipping the Balance in Southeast Asia? Thailand, the United States and China." 7–9. Canberra: Strategic & Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University and Center for Strategic and International Studies.

<sup>6</sup> See page 46 of National Security Strategy Archive, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America," <http://nssarchive.us/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2017.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Briefing on The Indo-Pacific strategy," April 2017, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/04/280134.htm>

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, "Remarks by Secretary Mattis at Plenary Session of the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue," July 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1538599/remarks-by-secretary-mattis-at-plenary-session-of-the-2018-shangri-la-dialogue>.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Director General of ASEAN Department Dr. Suriya Chindawongse, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok, on July 26, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Defense.

<sup>11</sup> The U.S. Department of State placed Thailand on the Tier 2 Watch List for the past three years in a row. The Trafficking in Persons Report released in July 2018 upgraded Thailand's status due to progress made in prosecuting culprits in human trafficking.

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